

I went to the woods because I
wished to live deliberately, to front
only the essential facts of life, and

Simplicity

see if I could not learn what it had
to teach, and not, when I came to
die, discover that I had not lived.

Henry David Thoreau



ONCE UPON A TIME, while having the foundation of our house dug out for the purpose of repairs, the attendant contractor said something that has always stuck with me—and has been reinforced by similar sentiments repeated by many others.

Since it is never a waste of time to do something nice for the person who holds the structural integrity of one's house in his hands, we one day offered him a bag of fresh green beans from our garden. He happily accepted, remarking that he would like to have a garden himself, but didn't have the time it would take.

His explanation made perfect sense at the time, but the next morning, while out picking the next batch of beans, I began thinking about what he had said. Our contractor had a wife and two teenage boys, so I can imagine that one reason he and his wife both worked so hard at their respective jobs was to keep

food on the table. Having observed, on occasion, the voracious appetites of teenage boys, I would assume that they paid a stiff tab at the local grocery.

Still, another option was available to them. They could have elected to work a little less hard at making money with which to purchase store-bought food, and thus free up more time to raise their own vegetables, thereby enjoying more time at home with their family—not to mention a superior quality produce for their meals.

Our contractor and his wife might also have rationalized their hard work and long hours away from home with the honorable

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Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds.

Thoreau

and not inexpensive goal of sending their two boys to college. Fair enough. Yet with all the hours they were away from home earning this money, it is possible they—like so many other well-intentioned parents—might have been depriving their sons of the finest education they could have: learning more from the lives of their own parents.

“Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!” Thoreau wrote, which is not at all contradictory to God’s word.

Incline my heart to Your testimonies,
And not to covetousness.
Turn away my eyes from looking at
worthless things,
And revive me in Your way.

Psalms 119:36-37 NKJV

The concept of simplicity does not speak against honorable work for wages. But there is a fine but bright line drawn between responsibly working to meet the needs of one’s family—and permitting that work to become one’s need in itself. In our habitual, monotonous pursuit of what some might call “a better life,” we pass over the more direct opportunity to have all of that—and more.

“Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Matthew 6:31-33

Within the parameters of Father God’s grace and His hand on our lives, we each are responsible for our choices. We are responsible for the decisions we make, the life-paths we choose to follow, and the amount of time we dedicate to those things we deem a priority.

We should consider it a red flag waving before our eyes when we keep expressing regret about certain things missing from our lives.

The goal—whether it be putting food on the table, sending children on to a higher education, or establishing a deeper relation-

ship with our God—may be admirable, but often, caught up in the ways of an energetically misguided society, we miss the shortest, most direct path.

For example, if our goal is to know God, then it is folly to spend years working to save our money to pay the tuition for training at seminary. If our goal is to know God, then we should rather take the more simple, direct path to that knowledge. We must open His word and abide there regularly. We must open our heart, because it is in that fragile home that He already dwells: waiting, listening to our groanings, quietly calling us to learn at His feet.

It is modern man’s bent to accomplish simple goals by complicated means. Sadly, it is our habit to route the path through the circuitous clutter of programs and classes and surveys and committees, rather than to take the path the crow flies.

If one takes the long way to get to the local drugstore, all one loses is extra minutes and gasoline. But if one takes the long way to a deeper, richer, more fulfilling relationship with God, one can miss the goal entirely. For programs and committees more often *insulate*, than facilitate a believer’s communion with his Lord.

A better choice is the direct path.

I have set the Lord continually before me;
Because He is at my right hand, I will not
be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my
glory rejoices;
My flesh also will dwell securely.
For You will not abandon my soul to
Sheol;
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to
undergo decay.
You will make known to me the path
of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
In Your right hand there are pleasures
forever.

Psalms 16:8-11

